

TOOLBOX TALK #9

Suicide Prevention



Today, our conversation takes on an essential and sensitive topic – suicide prevention. Suicide prevention is a critical aspect of workplace safety. It involves recognizing the signs of emotional distress, understanding the factors that contribute to suicidal thoughts, and knowing how to intervene effectively. Prevention efforts can save lives by fostering an environment where workers feel supported and valued.

Why It Matters in the Construction Industry

1. **High Risk:** Construction workers have one of the highest suicide rates compared to other industries, nearly four times the national average.
2. **Stress Factors:** High job demands, long working hours, job insecurity, and physical injuries can contribute to mental health challenges.
3. **Culture of Silence:** The construction industry traditionally emphasizes toughness and self-resilience, which can make it difficult for workers to seek help or support.

Common Signs to Look Out For

In Yourself or Coworkers

1. **Behavioral Changes:** Withdrawal from coworkers, family, and friends, increased lateness or absenteeism, changes in work quality.
2. **Emotional Signs:** Expressions of hopelessness, anxiety, or extreme mood swings.
3. **Verbal Cues:** Talking about feeling trapped, being a burden, or not having a reason to live.
4. **Physical Symptoms:** Noticeable changes in sleep or eating patterns, increased use of alcohol or drugs.

Impact of Suicide in Construction

The impact of suicide extends far beyond the individual, affecting coworkers, families, and friends. Grieving teams may experience decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, and difficulty focusing on tasks. This loss can ripple outward, leaving many to struggle with grief, guilt, and confusion.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. **What strategies can we implement to support a coworker who may be showing signs of distress or suicidal thoughts?** Can anyone share an example of how you've supported a coworker or how you were supported? How can we encourage more of that support on the job site?

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Ways Crews Can Look Out for Each Other

1. **Open Communication:** Encourage team members to talk openly about their struggles without fear of judgement.
2. **Buddy System:** Pair up workers to check in with each other regularly.
3. **Regular Check-Ins:** Supervisors should frequently and informally check-in with their crew to assess their well-being.
4. **Education:** Take the time to learn more about mental health through free resources.

How Crews Can Help Someone in Crisis

1. **Recognize the Signs:** Pay attention to the warning signs of suicide and intervene early.
2. **Talk and Listen:** Approach your coworker in a non-judgmental way. Let them know you are there to support them and listen.
3. **Direct Them to Resources:** Provide information about where to get help, such as the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline or other mental health resources.
4. **Stay With Them:** If someone is in immediate danger, stay with them until help arrives or they are safe.

A Collective Responsibility

1. **Leadership Involvement:** Management and supervisors should lead by example by prioritizing mental health and demonstrating empathy and understanding.
2. **Culture of Care:** Foster a workplace culture that values mental health as much as physical health.
3. **Empowerment:** Encourage workers to look out for one another and speak up if they notice someone struggling.
4. **Confidential Support:** Ensure that all conversations and support are kept confidential to build trust and safety.

Remember: Every one of us has a role to play in suicide prevention. By being aware, supportive, and proactive, we can create a safer, healthier, and more productive work environment.

988 Lifeline

TEAM 1-800-634-7710

Additional resources can be found at www.northcountrycarpenter.org/mental-health